

Using Intelligence Tests in Counseling

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Introduction

One of the salient problems of students who come in for counseling is lack of self confidence. At home and in the classroom students receive physical and verbal punishment for being themselves. They are reinforced with words which discourage uniqueness or individuality. Some educational institutions aim at the upbringing of students who blindly conform to the value systems of the teachers and administrators. Those who try to think by themselves are labelled as dangerous or undesirable students and are expelled from the institutions.

Those who claim to be educators use various methods to validate or affirm their own actions and testing is one such method. Unwise use of test data may cause individuals to lose self-esteem. Ebel cites four harmful consequences of testing:

It may place an indelible stamp of intellectual status—superior, mediocre or inferior — on a child, and thus predetermine his social status as an adult, and possibly also do irreparable harm to his self esteem and his educational motivation.

It may lead to a narrow conception of ability, encourage pursuit of this single goal, and thus tend to reduce the diversity of talent available to society.

It may place the testers in a position to control education and determine the destinies of individual human beings, while, incidentally, making the testers themselves rich in the process.

It may encourage impersonal, inflexible, mechanistic processes of evaluation and determination, so that essential human freedoms are limited or lost altogether.¹

The purpose of this paper is to point out the importance of sensitive and intelligent interpretation of tests so as to give each individual the maximum opportunity to develop his potentialities and decide on his course of life.

Administration and Interpretation

Intelligence is a very controversial term. It is evident from the fact that there

is no accepted definition even among the psychologists. Not only do they disagree on the concept of intelligence but they are divided among those who favor heredity, those who stress the importance of environment or nurture, and those who say that both nature and nurture influence intelligence. The majority of psychologists today, however, believe that heredity and environmental factors enter into all behavior.²

For a counselor, the answer to the problem of nature versus nurture is not so important as to the fact that the word intelligence means different things to each individual. Some people consider intelligence as the ability to live effectively in the society. Others describe intelligence as the quality needed to succeed in school. Still others include such qualities as creativity, adaptability, and dexterity.

Whatever concepts they hold, people react differently toward intelligence tests. Unless counselors take this into consideration, they will be faced with many problems. There are people who oppose any type of test, whether it is achievement, aptitude, or intelligence test. In this case the best we can do is to explain to the counselee that tests are used to help the individual.

One criticism is that tests given early in childhood to determine one's course of life is very dangerous.³ Many studies show that IQ scores of people in childhood and adolescence do not correlate. For example, 50 children from whom complete Stanford-Binet records were available, showed that 62 percent changed more than 15 points between the ages of 3 and 10 years old.⁴ We must be very careful when we use intelligence tests to differentiate students.

Scarr and Weinberg studied 130 black and interracial children who had been adopted by 101 white families in Minnesota and came to a conclusion that if all black children had better home environments, "their IQ scores would be 10~20 points higher than the scores are under current rearing conditions."⁵

Scarr and Weinberg also state:

If higher IQ scores are considered important for educational and occupational success, then there is need for social action that will provide black children with home environments that facilitate the acquisition of intellectual skills tapped by IQ measures.⁶

Jensen who studied black and white children aged 6 to 16 from one rural area in Georgia concludes:

Thus it appears that a cumulative deficit due to poor environments has contributed, at least in part, to the relatively low average IQ in the present sample of blacks in rural Georgia.⁷

Since I favor the concept that both heredity and environment influence one's intelligence, I would not want to place children who were found to be below average in IQ scores in special classes without considering why they received such scores.

Unless one is found to have a serious brain damage, we should not take away the opportunity from an individual to become the kind of person he wishes to be. If a student of average intelligence wishes to become a professor, we should give him a chance to show his real potential. If a person is able to teach something of value, he does not have to receive a high score on intelligence tests. Personality is more important than excess intelligence in occupations where human relations come in.

Counselors must be cautious in administering and interpreting intelligence tests. Most intelligence tests are constructed, based on typical American middle class values. Children of different sub-cultures are not usually familiar with these values. In answering certain questions, these children may give responses which are completely opposite of the expected answers. These answers, however, may be congruent with the value system of the group being tested. Stanford-Binet, for instance, was standardized using American children. Therefore the scores of children who are unfamiliar with the American norm should be viewed with suspicion.⁸

Papalia and Olds state:

If a person is finding absurdities in a picture, the picture has to be something with which the test-taker is familiar. The conventionalities of art will affect the way the test-taker views the picture: A group of Oriental immigrant children in Israel, asked to provide the missing detail for a picture of a face with no mouth, said that the body was missing. They were not used to considering a drawing of a head as a complete picture and regarded the absence of a body as more important than the omission of a mere detail like the mouth.⁹

Another idea to keep in mind when administering tests utilizing verbal methods is their effects on children whose strengths lie in areas other than verbal ability.¹⁰ This is one of the reasons why tests with both verbal and performance scales, like the WISC, for example, should also be used in child assessment.

We should not forget that intelligence tests can be used to prove competency in a given field. If a member of the minority group receives a good score it will be of great benefit to him.

The personality make-up of the individual taking the test must also be con-

sidered when we administer tests. If a person who performed poorly finds out the results, it will certainly have an impact on his self-esteem. Although any one test measures only a small portion of what we consider intelligence to be, explanation of this fact will not restore self-esteem in many people. Those without self-confidence usually perform below their actual capacity. Therefore, it could hinder performance in classes. Some children with high IQ's will not do well in school because intelligence is only one of the factors essential to academic success. Some students, on the other hand, with low IQ's do well because there is motivation to achieve, self-confidence, or good social adjustment.¹¹ We could also say that the intelligence test failed to reflect the real mental ability of the students.

Conclusion

Counselors and psychologists must conduct programs to familiarize tests and their significance to the students and to the general public. To a certain extent, it is possible to reduce fear of tests by providing information through seminars, lectures, and pamphlets, for instance. The public should be informed of the various limitations of intelligence tests. Effort should be made to construct more valid and reliable intelligence tests, and at the same time, an accurate picture of the testing arena should be presented to the public because we may never be able to produce tests which are completely valid and reliable.

NOTES

- 1 Ebel, Robert L., "The Social Consequences of Educational Testing," in Alexander G. Wesman (chairman), *Proceedings of the 1963 Invitational Conferences on Testing Problems* (Princeton, N. J. : Educational Testing Service, 1964), p. 132.
- 2 Anastasi, Anne, "Heredity, Environment, and the Question How?" *Readings : Child Psychology*, 1973, p. 74.
- 3 Brim, Orville G., "American Attitudes Toward Intelligence Tests," *American Psychologist*, 1965, 20, p. 152.
- 4 Reese, Hayne W. and Lipsitt, Lewis P., *Experimental Psychology*, 1970, p. 538.
- 5 Scarr, S., and Weinberg, R., "IQ Performance of Black Children Adopted by White Families," *American Psychologist*, 1976, 31 (10), p. 738.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Jensen, A. R., "How much can we boost IQ and scholastic achievement?" *Harvard Educational Review*, 1969, 39, p. 191.
- 8 Johnson, Ronald C. and Medinnus, Gene R., *Child Psychology*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1969, p. 512.
- 9 Papalia, Diane E. and Olds, Sally W., *Human Development*, New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1981, p. 279.

10 Johnson, Ronald C., p. 513.

11 Watson, Robert I. and Lindgren, Henry Clay, *Psychology of the Child*, New York : John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1973, p. 387.